

***Verbascum speciosum* Schrader (Scrophulariaceae) found in San Miguel County, New Mexico**

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If you ever encounter *Verbascum speciosum* Schrader, aka SHOWY or HUNGARIAN MULLEIN, you won't miss it. It is a giant at 6 feet tall with bright yellow flowers on a candelabra shaped panicle. It is native to eastern Europe and western Asia, and beyond specific ornamental or agricultural plantings, it is not welcome here in New Mexico. The cat is already out of the bag in northern California and the propensity for hybridization with other mulleins is high.

I saw it when I was driving between San Ignacio and Las Tulas in San Miguel County. There was a field of it on the 3,000 acre Pritzlaff Ranch, owned by the Biophilia Foundation, that caught my eye this summer. Being a curious botanist I went over and talked to the ranch manager who let me take specimens and photos.

He said they planted the *Verbascum* some years ago as feed for WHITE PEACOCKS they were raising, and later for COLORFUL PEACOCKS (both *Pavo cristatus*). Neither did well at the ranch, and both died out. Apparently, the plants flourished and spread. This summer about 10-12 plants were located one-half mile from the ranch, presumably transported by birds. Surveys might actually find more.

Kelly Allred identified my specimens. He concluded it was *Verbascum speciosum* based on the following characteristics: 1) highly branched inflorescence; 2) \pm permanently tomentose leaves (not white-floccose); 3) non-decurrent stem leaves; 4) all anthers reniform and sitting cross-wise atop the filaments; 5) all filaments with white hairs; 6) flowers yellow; 7) stigmas spatulate; and 8) petals lacking pellucid glands. Unlike many other genera in the Scrophulariaceae, it remains classified in the figwort family.

Specimens are deposited in the herbarium at New Mexico State University (NMC/NMCR).

In my mind, *Verbascum speciosum* belongs on List A of the New Mexico Noxious Weed list. These are species that are rare in the state which should be targeted for eradication before they spread any further. I sometimes wonder what would happen if it hybridized with *V. thapsus*. We have more than enough of the latter. Would we have a "super-spreader" if they hooked up? What would our landscapes look like? Pretty as it is, I hope we never find out.

Botanice` est Scientia Naturalis quae Vegetabilium cognitiorem tradit.

— **Linnaeus**



Botany is the natural science that transmits the knowledge of plants.

— ***Linnaeus***

